

# Formative or Summative

*A Case Study of Classroom Assessment in a Chinese University*

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Master Thesis

European Master in Higher Education

Institute for Educational Research

Faculty of Education

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## **Synopsis**

This research study investigated the students' and teachers' perspectives on using the portfolio assessment, which is a new practice in the context of this research study. In China-Mainland, timed-essay exam has been used for writing assessment for a long time; portfolio was introduced recently with a view to improving the assessment quality and help teachers and students improve teaching and learning respectively.

The results have suggested that both students and teachers hold positive perspectives on this new portfolio assessment. They have shown their preference on this new practice. From the perspectives of students, portfolio assessment can help them do the self-reflection and their learning behavior could be modified well through this channel. Interviews with classroom teachers also demonstrate the findings from data with students and that teachers would make some modifications as well in their teaching methods and behavior. Nonetheless, the problem on students' peer feedback in the portfolio should also be taken into consideration because some peer feedbacks are not in good qualities.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my greatest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Anne Line Wittek, for her inspirational tutorials and suggestions during my research. Especially, thanks so much for her constructive feedback and her great patience in answering my questions.

Also, I would like to express my gratitude to all my instructors since the beginning of this program in August 2007. My thanks to my tutors in my first master program in UK is great as well. At the same time, many thanks to one of my teachers during my undergraduate study, Associate Prof. Hongxia Zhang, who has done a very helpful introduction to the study of writing assessment and portfolio assessment. Moreover, I am grateful to my classmates and friends through around Europe because they have brought great pleasure to my life with this HEEM program.

Finally, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my dear parents, , without whose support and encouragement I would not have completed my master study.

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# **Chapter 1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This research seeks to investigate the current practice of the writing portfolio assessment in first year Chinese English major writing classroom, particularly the students' perceptions of the portfolio format and their performance in the assessment. The research aims to provide the English majors' writing teacher with quality in-depth data to enhance their understanding of the complex nature of writing portfolio in their teaching and also in students' learning through several research questions based on a systematic literature review of several theoretical issues. The study is intended to lead to the development of the innovation of adopting portfolio assessment in the curriculum, and to help English major students be more familiar with what they are doing at present.

## **1.2 Rationale of the research**

Portfolio assessment is not new in the field of general education assessment. According to Weigle (2002), portfolios have actually been a standard form of assessment in the disciplines as arts, architecture, photography, etc. And currently portfolio assessment has been used widely in first-language settings, and also applied in the second language writing. Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) have labeled nine characteristics of the portfolio assessment, among which the most important three components may include collection, reflection, and selection. There are many studies of portfolio assessment, as Song &

August (2002) have presented, that compared timed impromptu essay exam portfolio with clear evaluation standards, this can be valid as a basis of making judgment of ESL writer's writing proficiency; Hirvela and Sweetland (2005) have found that the students would like the idea of portfolio and shown how the students have responded to the assessment; Richardson (2000) has argued the students regard teacher's feedback as authoritative. However, little has been done in a foreign language context, particularly in the context of Chinese foreign language learners (except Padilla et al 1996). In addition, portfolio assessment is an innovation in the writing instruction in the context of the research, and it is necessary to investigate the present practice, which will be helpful for future teaching and learning. Particularly, when reviewing literature and connecting to classroom practice, a host of interested issues or questions were raised for my thinking, for example:

- 1) To what extent the new portfolio practice is different from the previous assessment format using one single essay?
- 2) To what extent the 'new' characteristics of portfolio affect the learner's performance in the writing task?
- 3) To what extent the 'new' characteristics of portfolio affect the teacher's teaching behavior in the writing task?
- 4) To what extent the learner's beliefs on using portfolio assessment is positive? In other words, how do learners understand this new practice?
- 5) To what extent the teacher's beliefs on using portfolio assessment is positive?

These issues provide an initial basis for indicating the research questions and



supporting literature background. In order to understand these, this research will collect data from two resources:

- 1) Some students who have been using portfolio practice;
- 2) Some classroom instructors from the context university in which they have proposed this new practice to assess learners. The instructors are not only the teachers, but also assessors and portfolio designers. They know students quite well, partially because each classroom size in this study is very small, around 20 students in each classroom.

These two resources will bring out both qualitative and quantitative data for further discussion and analysis. Before the description of the thesis structure comes, some background of the Chinese tertiary English education will be presented in the next section.

### **1.3 Background of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Mainland China**

No one can deny the fact that English has spread to become a world language (Widdowson, 1997: 135). English is now being marked as the language of “international communication and understanding” with the specific purposes such as international relations, economic development, international travel, and education (Phillipson, 2001: 190; Crystal, 1997: 78). It is now a politically, economically and socially powerful language. As Phillipson (2001: 187) has summarized in a recent paper, “English is integral to the globalization processes that characterize the contemporary post-cold-war

phase of aggressive casino capitalism, economic restructuring, McDonaldisation and militarism on all continents.” English language learning, therefore, is highly significant in the powerful current of technologic and economic globalization.

In the context of China, English is not an institutionalized language as it has not developed as the primary language spoken by any segment of the population and has not been developed as an official language of the country (Turner & Acker, 2002: 29). Although not giving English any special administrative status, both China’s central and local governments invest heavily in training English language teachers and in technology improvement for teaching and learning so as to satisfy the needs of reform and modernization after entering WTO (Cheng & Mao, 2002: 303). According to China’s English teaching outline (2000), English is now the most-studied lingua franca because of its crucial importance for international communications. In most areas English instruction starts in the third year primary school, and then becomes the compulsory subject from middle school until the second year in the university. Students at different levels must take English to satisfy foreign language requirements (Cheng, 1992: 162). Hence, English language teaching and learning performs a valuable function in the context of China.

#### **1.4 Structure of the dissertation**

As I have noted in the very beginning, this research aims to understand the

practice of portfolio assessment from the perspectives of students and also the classroom instructors. In Chapter 2, relevant theoretical issues will be discussed, which is composed of review of EFL in China; the nature of writing, the study of portfolio, and issues on impact of assessment on teaching and learning. Following this, the specific research questions will be raised in the first part of Chapter 3, which will also include how the data are collected and what instruments are used. The description of data and discussion of findings will be presented in Chapter 4. The analysis and discussion will lead to the conclusion in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Chinese Higher Education and English Education**

#### **2.1.1 Education Reform in Mainland China's Universities**

Due to the sweeping changes taking place in China after entering WTO, the reform of state education began in earnest at the very end of the 1990s and one of the most important components of this modernization process is the implementation of English Majors Curriculum (2004) which places considerable emphasis upon developing students' ability in comprehensive use of English in reading, listening, speaking, writing and translation, and hence yield to urgent command for improving college English teaching pedagogy (Kong, 2006: 3).

According to the English Majors Curriculum (2004), English teaching should be based on English language knowledge and practical use, learning strategies and trans-cultural communication. Guided by theories on English language teaching, English teaching pedagogy should involve various teaching models and approaches. In terms of reading ability, three levels are proposed in Curriculum:

- 1) Basic level: Students can basically understand general domestic English articles and newspapers with the reading speed of 70 words per minute. Students can basically understand practical

documents in their work and daily lives.

- 2) Intermediate level: Students can basically understand English articles on newspapers and magazines in English-speaking countries with reading speed of 80 words per minute. Students can basically understand the academic documents.
- 3) Advanced level: Students can understand difficult English articles. They can read original edition of English books and articles on newspapers and magazines in English-speaking countries via using the dictionary. Students can fluently read academic documents.

In order to suit the requirement of English Major Curriculum, especially the demand for reading ability, certain issues must be highlighted both in teaching and learning (Lu, 2006: 68). The teaching methods heavily focus on teaching and passing on knowledge rather than on learning and language practice. On the other hand, students' attitudes towards English learning are mainly instrumental and correspondingly study passively and inefficiently evidence for this. In order to solve these problems, Lu indicated that teachers should use teaching materials flexibly, optimize learning environment, and improve teaching methods especially on reading dimension. It is thus the teacher's role to equip undergraduates with the skills and strategies for taking the next steps in their learning.

### **2.1.2 EFL Climate in Mainland China**

In the first chapter, I have briefly introduced the English education in mainland China. In this part, I will draw more details on this, in which I use 'climate' to

refer to popular development of English teaching and learning.

Contrary to traditional western philosophical assumptions about 'the emancipatory and socially energizing power of education', there are those whose analysis presents a paradigm which is 'oppressive and destructive in its lack of acknowledgement for alternative cultural expressions of learning and development'. (Turner & Acker, 2002: 11). Cultural implications of different teaching practices hence become pivotally important for educational professionals.

For Chinese students from Confucian-heritage cultures the adoption of deep learning strategies may be activated by 'a head of mixed motivational steam: personal ambition, family face, peer support, material reward, and yes, possibly even interest (Biggs & Watkins, 1996: 273). While for Western students motivation is an antecedent of the desired deep learning strategies where the intention is to understand what is being learned (ibid.). Zhao and Campbell further promote the idea that the Chinese learner of English wants to show that he or she possesses English through attaining a tested standard, but they do not necessarily want the ability to communicate in English (cited in Turner & Acker, 2002: 29). That is to say, university non-English major undergraduates study English to gain a high score in their English exams rather than identify the study of English as an instrument for international communication.

Remaining as the most-studied foreign language in China, English now

serves as access for Chinese to Western science and technology. The increased flow of Western tourists and businessmen to China has made it crucial to use English though in restricted context (Kachru, 1992: 162). In order to meet the needs of social development, technological improvement and economic globalization, college English teaching reform has been carried out by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China which shifts attention on communicative language teaching (2002). This recognition further recommends that classroom communication is real to learners in the sense that it engages them in understanding and producing meanings that are important to them. Hence if learners are to develop the discourse roles that characterize the motivated language users, those roles must be available to them in the classroom first (Little, 1991: 29) and the consequence is that students not only perform the given tasks with a faire measure of competence in the classroom but also act well in a more flexible and complicated language use environment outside the classroom.

Thus this new shift requires university English teachers to motivate undergraduates to learn instead of forcing them to learn. In this context, it is the teachers' job to search for the most effective and feasible motivational conditions and activities that are appropriate for classroom use.

### **2.1.3 Importance of Writing for English Majors in Chinese Universities**

Admittedly, in the past twenty years, we have begun to recognize the importance of instruction of foreign language writing skills in classroom. Reid (2001) has argued three reasons for the recognition of the importance of

teaching writing, firstly, driven by direct tests of writing included on standard tests; secondly, necessity for better teacher preparation in second language writing; in addition, more research in foreign language writing and development of materials. Reid's discussion has also outlined the development of writing teaching in certain ways. Taken as an example, in the late 1980s, ETS began to add written test-TWE (Test of Written English) on TOEFL, with a view to assessing the test taker's proficiency in a more reliable way, as well as catering for the needs of educational institutions, which had claimed the record of TOEFL test without direct test of writing skills could not reflect the authentic writing ability of the applicants. McNamara (2003) has noted the washback effect of language testing, which means the effect of testing upon teaching. Consequently, teachers have been paying more attention on writing instruction than before.

In Mainland China, writing courses are compulsory for English majors in the second and third academic years. English majors have to pass the national Test for English Majors Grade 4 (TEM-4) for the awarding of bachelor degree and certificate of graduation. And there is also a higher-level test of TEM for English majors, though optional, most of students will take it. In these two tests, writing sections are included. Here, I want to use the statistical analysis of records of test takers of TEM-4 in 2002. The test takers are all from my former college.

Besides, English majors have to write their undergraduate theses in English, which require a qualified ability in English writing. They also need to write



comments on literature masterpieces in Literature courses. In one word, writing class is of vital importance for English major students, not only for passing the test, but also for their learning for other subjects.

## **2.2 Nature of Writing ability**

Regarding this research study is mainly about an assessment tool for English writing course at tertiary level, before moving on to the discussion and review of portfolio practice, it is necessary to see what writing or writing ability is.

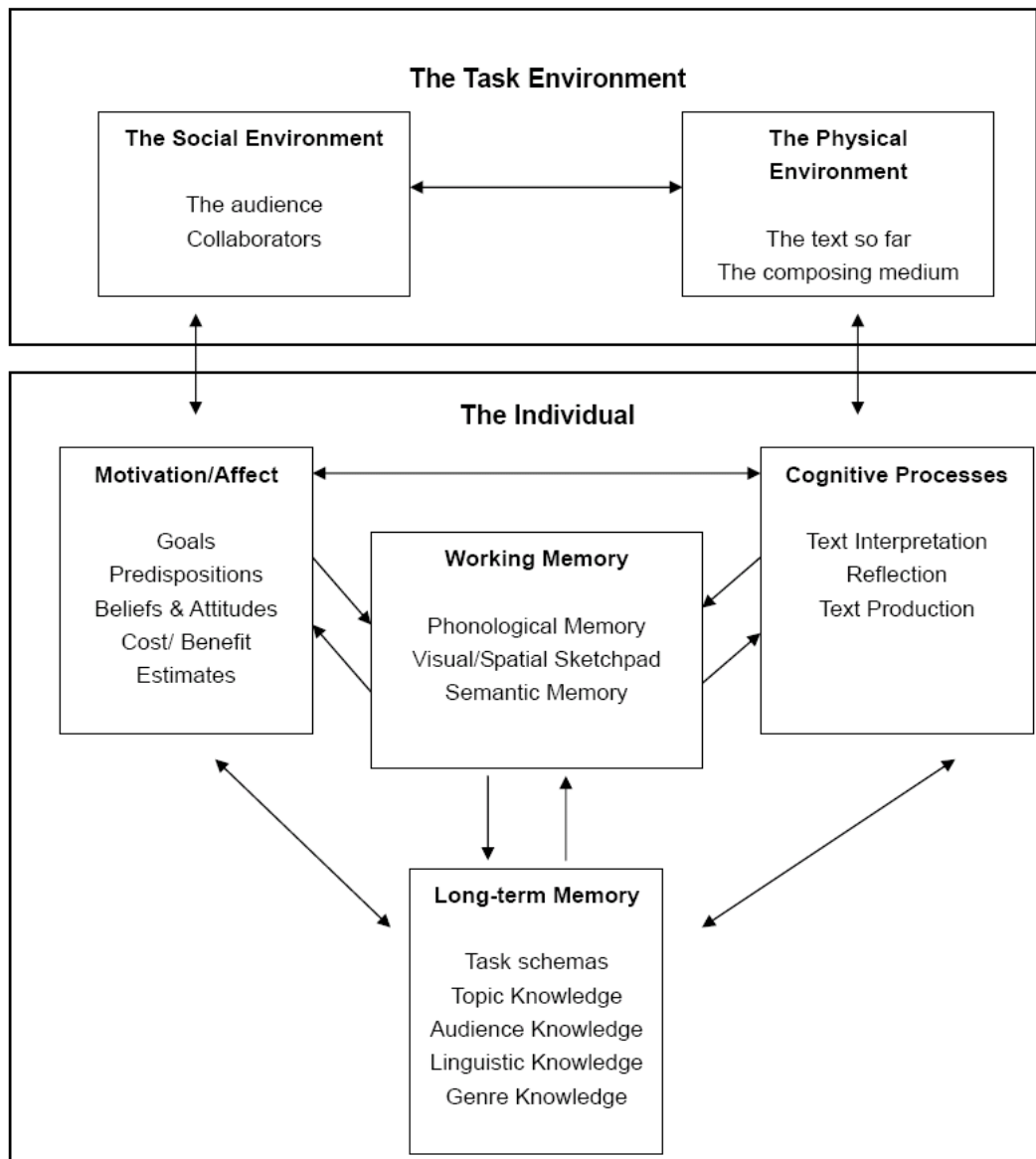
The first issue that should be addressed here is the relationship between speaking and writing. Brown (1994) has provided several characteristics that can differentiate written language from spoken language: permanence; more production time; distance between the writer and reader in both time and space; orthography; complexity; formality; wider variety of vocabulary. Sperling (1996: 56) has concluded that:

*'To talk of written and spoken language differences is to consider the range of communicative purposes to which either writing or speaking is put. In this sense, broader characteristics- such as what gets said and what remains implicit, what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded, and what is stated by whom and under what circumstances- implicate the norms and expectations of the range of contexts in which both writing and speaking are produced'*

Grabowski (1996) has noted that writing requires more time and energy spent on cognitive activities.

As for the nature of the writing ability, Weigle (2002) has summarized writing as both social and cultural phenomenon. Writing is 'an act that takes place within a context, that accomplished a particular purpose, and that is appropriately shaped for its intended audience' (Hamp-Lyons & Kroll 1997: 8). Similarly, Sperling has noted that 'writing, like language in general, is a meaning-making activity that is socially and culturally shaped and individually and socially purposeful' (1996: 55). To expand the understanding of the social aspect of writing, Hayes has stated: '(writing) is also social because it is social artifact and is carried out in a social setting. What we write, how we write, and who we write to is shaped by social convention and by our history of social interaction...The genres in which we write were invented by other writers and the phrases we write often reflect phrases earlier writers have written' (1996: 5). As for the cultural aspect, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) has pointed out that variation in writing in different cultures does not reflect inherent differences in thought patterns but rather 'cultural preferences which make greater use of certain options among the linguistic possibilities' (page 184).

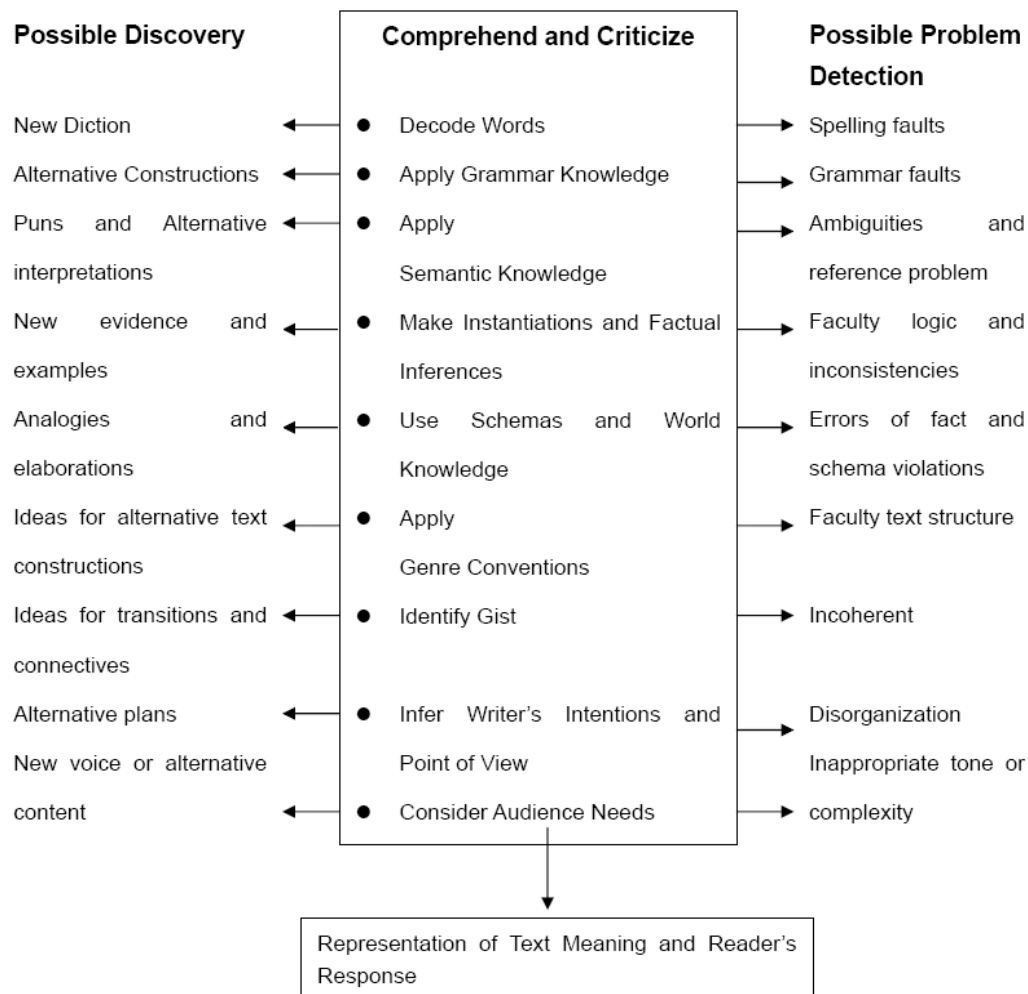
Another issue which should be addressed here is the model of the writing process. For writing is a cognitive activity, models of complex cognitive activities are useful for considering the various factors that may affect the writing process (Weigle 2002). Hayes' (1996) model of writing sees the writing process as consisting of task environment and the individual (see the Figure 2.1 on the next page).



**Figure 2.1 Hayes' Model of Writing (1996)**

The task environment is composed of social environment and physical environment. The former one incorporates the real or imagined audience, and any other collaborators; the latter refers to the text written so far, which will affect the writer's further efforts and jobs, and the composing medium as well. Individual aspects of writing involve interactions among working memory, motivation and affect, cognitive process, and long-term memory. Working memory in Hayes' model includes phonological memory, visual-spatial

sketchpad, and semantic memory. The writer's goals, predispositions, beliefs, and attitudes and cost-benefit estimates may influence the way the writer goes in the writing process and the error that will be made. Dweck (1986) and Palmquist & Young (1992) have also suggested that students' beliefs about the causes of successful performance influence the amount of effort they are going to exert. For second language or foreign language writers, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) has provided several possible motivators for the writers: desires to integrate into the culture; grades; higher proficiency; learning new information; future job or promotion; impressing teachers or other students. The cognitive processes in the model include the text interpretation, reflection, and text production. The first element includes listening, reading, and scanning graphics. The importance of reading has been emphasized by Hayes. Three types of reading essential for writing have been discussed: reading to evaluate; reading source texts; reading instructions. The first of these requires the writer to read the text critically to detect possible problem and to find potential improvements. A model of reading to evaluate can be found in Figure 2.2. It can be found from the Figure 2.2 that the cognitive process of reading when writing should include decoding of words, application of grammar knowledge, application of semantic knowledge, making instantiations and factual inference, using of schemas and world knowledge, application of genre conventions, identification of gist, inference of writer's intentions, and consideration of audience needs.



**Figure 2.2 Cognitive processes in reading to evaluate texts**

**(Hayes 1996)**

The fourth component of Hayes' model is long-term memory, including task schemas, topic knowledge, audience knowledge, genre knowledge, and linguistic knowledge. Task schemas refer to the information stored in long-term memory specifying how to carry out a particular task; topic knowledge is knowledge essential for writing; audience knowledge refers to the considerations of social and cultural issues; genre knowledge refers to the socially and culturally appropriate forms; the linguistic knowledge includes the knowledge of the language resources.

Recently, computer technology has a major impact on 'the ways we write, the genres we create, the authorial identities we assume, the forms our finished products take, and the ways we engage with readers' (Hyland 2002: 73). Weigle (2002) has argued that technology is 'changing the way we think about writing and how we do it' (page 231). Baron (1998) has argued that the increasing practice of composing online will reinforce such tendency as written English is more like spoken English. Another change taken place on writing is the use of hypertext has been popular. Hypertext, a fully electronic, fluid, interactive textual form, allows writers to 'provide links to digitized graphics, video, sounds, animation and other prose sources, enabling readers to construct different pathways through the text that reflect their own interests and decisions' (Hyland 2002: 75). Weigle (2002) has pointed out that using of hypertext would challenge the perceptions of written texts which should be kind of linear documents with an inherently logical ordering of ideas and arguments. Following is comments on hypertext from Douglas (1998: 155):

*'The beauty of hypertext is...that it propels us from the straightened 'either/or' world that print has come to represent and into a universe where the 'and/and/and' is always possible. It is an environment more conducive to relativistic philosophy and analysis, where no single account is privileged over any others, yet, because it is written in code, writers can ensure that readers traverse some bits of the argumentative landscape more easily and more frequently than others, or that readers are left to make their own connections between one bit of text and another.'*

## **2.3 Nature of Portfolio for Assessing Writing**

### **2.3.1 Defining and Describing Portfolio**

The first issue addresses what portfolio is and the purpose of portfolio assessment. Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer has defined portfolio as 'a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas' (1991:60). Another definition by Hamp-Lyons is that portfolio is 'a collection of texts the writer has produced over a period of time to the specifications of a particular context' (1991: 262). The collection of written samples submitted by students is then considered to be more comprehensive than only one essay or written work done in a limited time. Belanoff and Dickson (1991) have explained that portfolio assessment alone could build a textured, multi-layered, focused measure of the writing ability students can demonstrate when given time to revise papers, and portfolio assessment alone could also map the process students go through as they live. Huot has also noted that 'the notion of writing as a testable skill is transformed into something that can only be described and at best measured through multiple and related samples of written work' (1994: 329). In addition to Huot's notion of 'writing as a testable skill', Hamp-Lyons and Condon have argued that portfolio in writing assessment 'could provide footprints that show a student's progress from one testing occasion to the next' (2000: 26). Herman et al (1996) have summarized the following list of potential purposes of the portfolio assessment, some of which go beyond what is normally expected of school-based tests:

- 1) Accountability; evaluating programme or curriculum effectiveness;

- 2) Evaluating individual student progress; grading; certifying student accomplishment;
- 3) Diagnosing students' needs; informing classroom instructional planning; improving instructional effectiveness;
- 4) Encouraging teacher efficacy; encouraging reflective practice at the school and classroom levels; supporting teachers' professional development;
- 5) Encouraging student efficacy; promoting student self-assessment; motivating student performance;
- 6) Communicating with parents.

(Herman et al 1996: 29)

Though Herman et al have noted the above-mentioned purpose of writing portfolio, Weigle (2002) has argued that these purposes can only be mutually complementary in the abstract but may contradict each other in practice, particularly between the purpose of classroom assessment and those of large-scale assessment. This issue concerns with the relationship between the writing portfolio as a kind of classroom-based writing assessment and timed impromptu essay test widely used in large-scale assessment, like TOEFL-iBT (Test of English as a Foreign Language-Internet Based Test), IELTS (International English Language Testing System), and CET (College English Test) and TEM (Test of English Majors) in Mainland China. I have mentioned the study of Song and August (2002), which has noted the limitations of timed impromptu essay tests, like failing to discriminate against the competent ESL writers. Weigle (2002) has noted that this is partly driven



by two aspects of test usefulness: reliability and practicality in terms of Bachman and Palmer's framework (1996). In contrast, classroom teachers may be more interested in the authenticity, interactivity and impact. Similarly as Weigle, Hamp-Lyons and Condon have explained the impetus for portfolio assessment from the perspective of teachers in classroom, instead of from testing and assessment specialists: 'teachers of writing were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with direct tests of writing and with holistic scoring...although such a direct sample is far superior instrument than the indirect test, teachers increasingly saw it as a context-poor assessment and began looking for an even better instrument' (2000: 12). Hamp-Lyons and Condon have further explained the reasons for the dissatisfaction: lack of authenticity, and washback. Study of portfolio assessment has actually begun as a way to overcome the criticisms of timed impromptu essay exams.

### **2.3.2 Portfolio Writing Assessment and Formative Assessment**

The second theoretical issue is concerned with the relationship between portfolio assessment and formative assessment. Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) have given nine characteristics to portfolio assessment: collection of written works; range of writing performance; delayed evaluation; selection of written works; student-centered control; reflection and self-assessment; measurement of growth along specific parameters; measurement of development over time. Among these nine characteristics, it is not difficult to find that the focus of portfolio has shifted from reliance on a final work and summative score to the evaluation of the formative progress of learner's

performance, involving learner's self-responsibility. Hyland has summarized some potential pros of writing portfolio, among which formative assessment means 'grading is often delayed until the end of the course, allowing teachers to provide constructive feedback without the need for early, potentially discouraging, evaluation' (2002:139). Hyland's summary about formative assessment has focused on the role of teacher's feedback, which should be constructive scaffolding to learner's performance, not a summative score. Portfolio assessment as a kind of formative assessment has been recognized by Alderson & Banerjee (2001). The functions of formative assessment for teachers have been suggested by Weir as 'to evaluate formatively, to make appropriate decisions concerning modifications to teaching procedures and learning activities...' (1993: 167). Bachman and Palmer have also approached the purpose of formative assessment as 'to help students guide their own subsequent learning, or for helping teachers modify their teaching methods, and materials so as to make them more appropriate for their students' needs, interests and capabilities ' (1996: 98). The invariable difference between formative assessment and summative assessment is not be difficult to see, that is, summative assessment is 'to assign grades for purpose of certification or promoting students to the next level' (Genesee & Upshur, 1996: 49) or 'to provide useful information ... of students' achievement or progress at the end of a course of study' (Bachman & Palmer, 1996: 49); formative assessment is that 'teachers assess the effectiveness of instruction informally on a continuous basis' and teachers working with students being educated through the medium of a second language especially need to assess their language performance at all time' (Genesee & Upshur, 1996: 49). Formative

assessment is considered to be complex through the notion of different types of feedback and assessment purpose (Bachman 1990). Nevertheless, formative assessment is preferred by teachers since it is seen as the 'silver bullet'- 'a means to improving teaching and learning and to being generally responsive to learner needs' (Rea-Dickins & Gardner 2000: 217). In addition, formative assessments are constrained by the policy. Rea-Dickins (2007a) has noted that 'bureaucratic requirements for achievement data may have the consequences of creating an imbalance in the range of assessment opportunities that teachers provide for their learners', and secondly, the reality can be 'a significant inhibitor to the development of enhanced professional understanding' (p. 8). In P.R.China, which is the context of the proposed study, the government requires the English majors to pass the national test; in addition, the university demands the final achievement data for the programme evaluation. The problem is that the teacher does not have enough time to have professional training in developing the methods in language assessment.

## **2.4 Assessment, Teaching, and Learning**

### **2.4.1 Impact of Assessment on Teaching and Learning**

The impact of tests and assessment, is also referred to washback, and in this study, they will be both used. Hughes (1989) and Bailey (1996) have considered impact of test as the effect or influence of testing on teaching and learning; Messick has argued that washback is 'the extent to which the test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise necessarily do' and such washback takes place 'only if that

evidence can be linked to the introduction and use of the test' (1996: 259). Alderson and Wall (1993) have raised fifteen hypotheses of washback: 'a test will influence teaching; a test will influence learning; a test will influence what teachers teach; a test will influence how teachers teach; a test will influence what learners learn; a test will influence how learners learn; a test will influence the rate and sequence of teaching; a test will influence the rate and sequence of learning; a test will influence the degree and depth of teaching; a test will influence the degree and depth of learning; a test will influence attitudes to the content, method, etc. of teaching and learning; tests that have important consequences will have washback; tests that do not have important consequences will have no washback; test will have washback on all learners and teachers; test will have washback effect for some learners and some teachers, but not for others' (1993: 120-121). Many studies have been done to demonstrate some of these hypotheses in language education field. For example, Wall and Alderson (1993) has argued the considerable impact of test, either negative or positive, upon the content of teaching. Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) undertook a study on TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language, designed by Educational Testing Service, USA) preparation courses, and showed that 'the TEOFL affects both what and how teachers teach, but the effect is not the same in degree or in kind from teacher to teacher, and the simple difference of TOEFL versus non-TOEFL teaching does not explain why they teach the way they do' (1996: 295). They have further concluded that the washback was caused by the 'administrators, material writers, and teacher themselves' (1996). The results of Robert's study (2002) have shown that TOEFL is a high-stakes test for the Korean learners

and their culture of learning, individual motivation, TOEFL preparation manuals affect how these learners perceive the TOEFL and practice for the test. In addition, Robert has found that there is a washback effect in grammar, reading and listening, and introduction of computerized TOEFL has a limited effect on test takers especially in writing part.

#### **2.4.2 Connecting Formative Assessment to Learning**

Portfolio assessment, normally considered as one format of formative assessment. This section will particularly draw the potential connection of formative assessment with learning. For some years, language testing research and second language acquisition research have largely been views as distinct areas of study. While, since the late 1980s, an increasing number of studies have begun to note the interfaces between these two fields in the area of applied linguistics. Bachman and Cohen have suggested three sources of variability which are central to both fields: 'individual differences in the language abilities that are acquired or measured; individual differences in the strategies and other processes that individuals employ in language use, as well as on language test tasks and second language acquisition (SLA) elicitation tasks; variation in the tasks and context and their effect on language use, as well as on performance on language test tasks and SLA elicitation tasks' (1998: 4). Shohamy has further argued that 'the disciplines of language testing and second language acquisition belong to the same field, that of language learning. They share similar goals of understanding the process of language learning, assessing it and looking for ways to improve it. Therefore, it is expected that the two disciplines would interact, share and contribute to

one another' (2000: 542). In this sense, Rea-Dickins (2007b) suggests 'the quality of teacher feedback and the impact of feedback on student uptake and output become important' (p.502). Afitsa, for example, in her study of English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, has found that 'teachers provided implicit corrective feedback 3-4 times more frequently than explicit feedback and that general rates of learner uptake in all classroom regardless of the subject –matter of the lessons was low' (cited in Rea-Dickins 2007a). Meanwhile, in formative assessment, not only the teacher assessment process and teacher feedback should be elaborated, but also concerning of the roles of learners' is also important. In this respect, two studies have supported the centrality of the learner (Spence-Brown 2002, Rea-Dickins 2002). Harlen and Deakin-Crick (2003) have identified three principles to formative classroom assessment, which involve effective teacher feedback, learner agency, and recognition of influences of assessment on learners' motivation and self-esteem. The study of centrality of the learner has also been done in the field of portfolio assessment, a kind of formative assessment. D'Aoust (1992: 48) has observed that 'more than folders; they (portfolios) are a way for writers to meet themselves and shape their writing development'. This means portfolios are not only the displays for others to measure, but also for the learners to know about themselves.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This research is aimed to investigate the practice of portfolio assessment, particularly on the perceptions of portfolio from perspectives of teachers and students. The research questions will be firstly discussed in this chapter. In addition, the research methods, and the data collection will be illustrated in details.

### **3.2 Research Questions**

Addressing the rationale for the proposed study, and issues raised up in Chapter 2, it can be seen that several issues have not be studied in the field of writing portfolio in language assessment, such as the student's reflection as Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) have suggested. Drawing connections between formative assessment and language learning has been proposed as an issue which merits further works (Rea-Dickins 2007a). Self-reflection, as an important characteristic in both formative assessment and foreign language learning process, should be investigated whether it exists in the process of assessment and learning or not and how it works. In addition, the learner is central in the formative assessment, while, how the learners in the process of portfolio assessment view this practice, and how these perceptions

affect their performance both in the portfolio assessment, as well as drawing connections between performance in such formative assessment and the summative final essay exam, have not been fully studied in the research, particularly in a foreign language teaching and learning context. In this proposed study, two research questions concerned with the above-mentioned issues will be raised as follows:

- 1) How do students understand the portfolio assessment and to what extent has the self-reflection been involved during taking the portfolio tasks?
- 2) How do teachers understand the portfolio assessment and students' performance in portfolio?

With a view to answering those two research questions, student questionnaire and interview with classroom instructor are employed as the research instruments to collect the data for further analysis, which will be focus of the following sections.

### **3.3 Research Instruments**

The data collected for this research comes from two sources: one is the student questionnaire; another is the teacher interview. The student questionnaire is designed to elicit the attitudes and opinions of test takers' towards portfolio. The teachers are those writing course instructors, who are designers of portfolio assessment in this study and know their students very well. The teachers will be interviewed through SKYPE (A low-fare web-based



phonecall software).

### **3.3.1 Student Questionnaire**

The students' perceptions will be collected through a questionnaire. McDonough and McDonough (2000) have analyzed the popularity of using questionnaire, which is considered to have several advantages as follows: 'the knowledge needed is controlled by the questions, therefore it affords a good deal of precision and clarity'; 'can be used on a small scale, in-house, and on a large scale'; 'data can be gathered in several different time slots'; 'self-completion questionnaires allow access to outside contexts so information can be gathered from colleagues in other schools and even other countries' (p. 171-172). In writing research, for example, Jenkins, Jordan and Weiland (1993) have used questionnaires to discover the writer's beliefs. In the proposed study, as the sample size is not small and the researcher cannot go back to the context of the study, using a questionnaire is the most convenient way to get the perceptions of students. Casanave and Hubbard (1992) have used a questionnaire to investigate writing skills and writing requirements of first-year doctoral research students in a large university in the United States. In this research, the questionnaire is consisted mainly of Likert-scale questions, ranking questions and open-ended questions. Allwright and Bailey (1991) have noted that the questionnaire could offer what has happened to the participants and what the participants think about it. In this research, around 30 portfolio takers, from two classrooms, will be invited to

finish the questionnaire. Since the participants come from different classrooms, data that have been collected can be more dimensional.

The questions in the questionnaire include both closed items and open questions. In some items, the participants are asked to choose one item or several items from other alternatives; the participants are also asked to describe their own opinions; Likert-scale items are used as well. In this research, the Likert-scale is a four-point scale, including the option of 'not at all', 'not much', 'quite a lot', and 'very much'. In addition, all the open questions in the questionnaire are required to be done in English.

### **3.3.2 Interview with Teachers**

Interviews in education research have been considered as 'having a potential for openness and allowing control of what is revealed to remain more or less with the respondent, giving room for individual expression and broaching of new topics; more like ordinary conversation and therefore to some extent a more personal context for information exchange; comprehension checks, hedges, and assurances of confidentiality can be requested and given at any point during the interview in order to maximize the usefulness of the data; the form of the answer is not constrained to ticks and circles, but is ordinary language with all its freedom and sensitivity' (McDonough & McDonough 2000: 172). Nonetheless, interview research methods have some limitations as well, like the personal impact of interviewer on the interviewee; difficulties of transcribing interview data and analysis of data which may affect the reliability of the research (McDonough & McDonough 2000). In this research, the

participants of the interview include two classroom teachers from which students also participate in the questionnaire.

In this research, the interviews are basically semi-structured, that is, the researcher, also as the interviewer, has a main idea of the direction of the interview and what it should be yielded through the interviews. Though there are specific questions in the interview, the participants can describe what they want to say about the topic. The researcher will also do adjustments according to the answers given by the participants, and investigate further questions if necessary. According to Patton, 'semi-structured interview can increase the comprehensiveness of the data and make data collection somewhat systematic for each respondent; logical gaps in data can be anticipated and closed' (1980: 206). The semi-structured interview is the most suitable method because it offers interviewees the freedom to talk about "what is of central significance on the topic and express their opinions freely" (Bell, 1993: 94), and on the other hand, it provides interviewers opportunities to "explore in-depth information" (Seliger & Shohamy 1989: 166) and the degree of power and control to ensure what should come out of it (Nunan, 1992: 149). Dowsett (1986) has also pointed out that in the semi-structured interview the interviewer would enjoy the flexibility and that a rich amount of data could be collected. All the interviews are done through the SKEPE and the notes will be made while interviewing. Most of the words told by interviewees will be written down for further research.

### **3.4 Techniques for Analyzing Data**

In the research, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been adopted. According to Nunan (1992: 4), the research should 'follow the paradigm of from exploratory to interpretive; utilize a non-experimental method; yield qualitative data; provide an interpretive analysis of that data'. Data collected for the purpose of this research come from the student questionnaires and the interviews with teachers. The student questionnaire will elicit statistical data and the qualitative information; the interview will result in qualitative information. Interpretation of the data will be done on the base of two kinds of data, which will be discussed in details as follows.

#### **3.4.1 Student Questionnaire**

Questionnaire on the use of portfolio has been posted on the website-[surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com), a big online engine for generating questionnaire and survey. The links to the online questionnaire have been sent out to the target group, and they finish the questionnaire on the internet. All the data have been collected automatically by the website and then been stored for future analysis according to the researcher's requirement. The data for this research will be analyzed in three steps: preparation, description, and interpretation (Munn & Drever 1999). According to Munn & Drever (1999), the data should be manageable; therefore, the coding will be done in the preparation. According to Cohen *et al.* (2000), coding is 'assigning a code number to each answer to a survey question' (page 265). However, not all the responses to closed questions can be coded as numbers, as the responses to the open-ended questions. Before coding the answers to questionnaire, 'editing-

checking' (page 265) should be done as suggested by Cohen *et al.* (2000), there are three main steps in editing: checking completeness, checking accuracy, and checking uniformity. Following the pre-checking and coding process, each data can be categorized, and the analysis of participants' responses is in forms of percentage. Each question in questionnaire will be analyzed separately and data is illustrated in tables to make it clear and easy to understand.

### **3.4.2 Interview with Teachers**

Rubin & Rubin (1995) have noted that interviewing, as a qualitative method, is a kind of guided conversation in which 'the interviewer carefully listens to the interviewee so as to hear the meaning of what is being conveyed' (page 7). During the process of interviewing, the interviewer and the interviewee are not only the speaker and listener; instead, they are active participants in a conversation. Indeed, Kvale (1996: 25) has suggested that 'an interview follows an unwritten script for interactions, the rules for which only surface when they are transgressed'; additionally, he has added that 'as the researcher is the research instrument, the effective interviewer is not only knowledgeable about the subject matter but is also an expert in interaction and communication' (1996: 147). In one word, it is crucially important for the researcher to know that the interview is 'a social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data collection exercise' (Cohen *et al.* 2000: 279). After conducting the interview, in the process of interpretation, the making of meaning will be central (Warren 2001). Meaning making requires understanding perspectives of both respondents and interviewer. In my research, the teachers in the

interviews are both designers of portfolio and course instructors; they also know students quite well; they mark the students' written essays in the portfolio assessment; they would also compare what they have found from the written works in the portfolio with the writing scores of final exam requiring finishing one single essay within a set time.

### **3.5 Research Validity**

Validity is an important key to effective research, which is a requirement for both qualitative and quantitative research. Sapsford & Jupp have defined validity as 'whether the evidence which the research offers can bear the weight of the interpretation that is put on it' (1996: 1). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have noted that validity is essentially to do with credibility. In language research, McDonough and McDonough have pointed out that validity can be achieved when the researcher is 'credible not only to consumers but also to the original participants in the situation under review' (2000: 63). In my research, to ensure the validity, piloting of the questionnaire and the triangulation has been done. Oppenheim (1992) has remarked that everything about the questionnaire should be piloted, and the piloting served principally to increase the reliability, validity, and practicability of the questionnaire (also see Morrison 1993; Wilson & McLean 1994). In this research, the first version of questionnaire has been tried out by some of same level students who will not participate in the research, whose feedback, together with the teachers'

comments, helped further improve the final version. Those feedbacks include the feedback on the wording of items, on the types of questions and the formats, on responses of categories and the appropriateness of questions, on the attractiveness and appearance, on the layout of questionnaire, on the time needed for finishing the questionnaire. The piloting also helped with identifying redundant question which gains a total same response, and identifying misleading and incomplete items.

Triangulation is another method of ensuring validity, which requires collecting data from different resources. Van Lier has noted that data triangulation would insure that 'a theory is tested in more than one way, increasing the likelihood that negative cases will be uncovered' (1988: 13). Cohen et al. (2000) have defined triangulation as 'the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behavior' (page 112), they have further added, 'in the use of multiple methods, triangulation may utilize either normative or interpretive techniques; or it may draw on methods from both these approaches and use them in combination' (page 113). In my study, data collected come from two sources: student questionnaire and the interview with classroom teachers. Two different data will be analyzed separately and compared in order to search for any finding which may confirm/disapprove each other.

### **3.6 Ethical Issues**

Cohen et al. has remarked that 'ethical issues may stem from the kinds of

problems investigated by social scientists and the methods they use to obtain valid and reliable data' (2000: 49). The research carried on here will follow the code of ethics for International Language Testing Association (ILTA), and the Chinese Ministry of Education Ethics Guideline for Social Science Research at Higher Education Institutions. Several ethic issues will be involved in the study. In the student questionnaire, the participant's informed consent will be confirmed first (the first part of questionnaire is to ask for the participant's consent), and the participant can withdraw at any stage or refuse to answer particular questions. Though in the survey with the students, some personal information will be required, the researcher will confirm it as confidential. The interview with teachers also has an ethical dimension. Kvale (1996) has identified three main areas of ethical issues in the interview: informed consent, confidentiality, and the consequences of interviews. The researcher herein confirms the following things have been done in this study: the interview is done with the teacher's consent; the interviews with the teachers are confidential; the anonymity is done; the possible consequence of the research has been made clear to the participants; all the data collected during the interviews are accessible only to the researcher himself; the data and the research will not be used for any commercial purposes.



## **Chapter 4 Data Analysis and Discussion**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the analysis of data collected through questionnaire and interview will be discussed. The discussion of data analysis is based on the researching techniques discussed in the Chapter 3. The analysis of data will be composed of two parts: the analysis of student questionnaire; and the analysis of interviews with classroom teachers.

### **4.2 Analysis of student questionnaire**

As what I have stated in 4.2, the research is conducted on a group of English Major Students who have been using the portfolio writing assessment. For the concerns of practicability and feasibility, the scale of survey through questionnaire is not much big. In this research, 35 students have participated in the research; however, 33 of them have completed all the parts of the questionnaire. Those two who have not finished all the parts of questionnaire have missed the Part 3, 4, and 5 in the questionnaire. Therefore, in this research, only 33 valid student questionnaires will be analyzed. The following discussion of the data is composed of four parts: the analysis of students' demographic background (part 2); the analysis of part 3 of the questionnaire; the analysis of part 4 which will be inserted into part 3 if available. All the quantitative data from part 2, 3 and 4 of the questionnaire have been entered

in to SPSS software (a statistical analysis software; the full name of SPSS is Statistical Package for Social Science).

#### **4.2.1 Analysis of background**

All the 33 participants have agreed to finish the questionnaires with their own consents. Among 33 participants, 20 are female; 13 are male. 16 test takers are aged 23 to 25; and 17 test takers are aged 18 to 22. As for the familiarity with writing in English outside the classroom, 25 of them have stated they would use English writing very often outside the classroom context.

#### **4.2.2 Analysis of part 3**

In the third part of the questionnaire, there are 21 Likert-scale questions about the participants' attitude towards and experience of taking portfolio assessment. There are four scales in each question: from not at all to very much. In this part, the responses to all the 21 questions will be demonstrated and analyzed. For a better understanding of the participants' responses to the questions, the questions will be grouped into several categories.

The first category is composed of question no. 1, 2 and 3, which is about the general perspectives and preference of portfolio assessment. The responses to these three questions are listed in the following Table 4.1:

Question Items	Very much	Quite a lot	Not much	Not at all
1) Generally speaking, to what extent will you like the portfolio assessment, comparing with previous timed-essay exam?	17	8	5	3
2) Do you think you have improved your writing ability through taking the portfolio assessment?	16	10	4	3
3) Do you think you have performed well in the portfolio assessment?	10	13	6	4

**Table 4.1**

From the table, it may be easy to find out that the majority of the participants, 25 exactly, think that they prefer the portfolio writing assessment. Meanwhile, more than 2/3half participants (26 persons) think they have improved there writing ability through the process of taking portfolio. In addition, most participants have agreed on that they have performed well in the portfolio assessment. One student has stated that he performed well because he likes this kind of assessment. The personal preference performed as an important factor here.

The second category is composed of question no. 4 and 5, both of which deal with the influence of writing task environment on the testing performance. The responses to these two questions are in table 4.2:

Question Items	Very much	Quite a lot	Not much	Not at all
4) Do you think your potential audience of your writing texts (Your classroom teacher or your fellow students) will have impact on your portfolio performance?	5	6	12	10
5) Do you think your cultural background and familiarity with writing tasks in the portfolio plays an important role in affecting your writing?	5	10	13	5

**Table 4.2**

From the results listed on the above table, most of the participants think that the potential audience of writing products will not affect their writing; and similarly, most of them think their cultural background and familiarity with writing tasks will not have any effect on the writing process. This result may indicate that, portfolio writing assessment, in this context, is fair for both teachers and students; also fair for students having varied cultural background and general knowledge.

The third category including questions no.6 to no.12 concerns the individual factors involved in portfolio assessment. The responses to these seven questions are listed in the following table 4.3:

Question Items	Very much	Quite a lot	Not much	Not at all
6) Do you think you will like the new practice of portfolio assessment before taking it?	15	5	8	5
7) Do you think you have been motivated through assessing fellow students' essays?	10	14	5	4
8) Do you think you have been motivated through more feedback given by your teacher?	11	10	7	5
9) Do you think your goals of improve specific language ability like grammar, vocabulary, etc, have been achieved?	7	10	10	6
10) Do you think your linguistic knowledge have been fully presented in the process of participating in portfolio assessment?	10	11	8	4
11) Do you think you have done self-reflection based on the varied feedback from both fellow students and teachers?	10	15	6	2
12) Do you think your self-reflection has helped you find out problems in English writing and improved your writing performance?	12	14	3	4

**Table 4.3**

For the sixth question, it seems that there are more participants showing preference to portfolio in the very beginning although they have not known much about it. There may be an explanation for this: there are five persons who have similarly (subject 6, 8, 12, 15, and 19) have mentioned in the additional open comment part that: 'for me, though I have not heard much about this new portfolio, I think it will be interesting because the timed-essay exam is really boring and students can even use templates to finish the task, which cannot be interesting and improve my true writing ability. One essay is only for getting a good score, and has pressure on me'. From this comment (by subject 15), it may be found out that some students show initial preference because it looks interesting and meanwhile the traditional essay exam is boring and not useful. For the questions no 7 and 8, there are high rate of positive answers. According to the literature, motivation factors will shape students' writing performance. In this study, the responses displayed here can demonstrate that the portfolio assessment can positively motivate students to perform well in the assessment. The reason for this can also been seen somehow from responses to question no. 6, where most students like this new portfolio. For the questions 9, more than half students agree on that their goals of improving specific linguistic ability have been achieved; similar results has been found on question no. 10, in which more than half students have fully presented their linguistic knowledge during taking portfolio assessment; questions no. 11 and 12 are concerning about cognitive process-self reflection in this research context. The responses displayed that a vast majority of students have agreed that they have done self-reflection in doing the portfolio tasks and this kind of self-reflection could help them improve writing

performance. One additional open comment on this issue can also demonstrate this result, subject 9 has said that 'I can reflect on what I have done and what I have not done; see my problems from teacher's more than once feedback; all the feedback can help me think more about my language; Indeed I have enjoyed this reflection process'. Other open comments can be found to demonstrate the students have reflected on themselves during giving feedback on fellow students' performance. Subject 21 has commented like this: 'I like the design of asking me to give feedback to my colleague. I can compare my problems in writing with my colleague. I can see what I can learn from him. At the same time, I can give him my suggestion based on my reflection of the same writing topic'.

Self-reflection cognitive process is an important feature of portfolio assessment. The fourth category including question 13, 14 and 15 concerns detailed investigation of self-reflection process in doing portfolio tasks. The responses are listed in the following table (Table 4.4):

Question Items	Very much	Quite a lot	Not much	Not at all
13) Do you think you have understood the feedbacks from teacher and fellow student when doing self-reflection?	10	15	6	2
14) Do you try to find out the difference between feedbacks given by teachers and fellow students?	8	10	7	8
15) Do you intend to find out new plans or alternatives when reviewing feedbacks?	14	10	3	6

**Table 4.4**

The responses to question 13 display a highly positive attitude, which means that most of the participants agree that they have understood their feedbacks received from teachers and students. From another prospective, it seems that students have seriously reflected on the feedback on their own writing products. This can be further demonstrated by positive responses to the question 14, which have demonstrated that more than half participants have tried to indicate differences of feedback from two different groups of audience. Although the result has not shown a vast majority, it can reflect somehow that students indeed have intention to reflect on their own writing products from different perspectives. As for question 15, a vast majority of students have tried to find alternatives or new plans to improve their task performance. One of the participants (subject 17) has mentioned her comment on this point:

*'as far as I know, during review the feedbacks from my teacher and my peer,*



*I will look at what kind of mistakes I have made and think about how I can improve on these specific aspects. Also I will think about possible new plans or new writing structure to achieve a better performance, for sometimes, I cannot do much more revision on the current text. More detailed thinking can also help me make my ideas more critical and more reasonable.'*

From this subject's words, I can deem that it is appropriate to say that students have found that self-reflection is very important. Students can find the importance of doing self-reflection and consider it serious. In the reflection process, the students have reviewed the feedbacks seriously.

The fifth category including questions no. 16 - 19 deals with the impact of portfolio assessment. The responses are as follows:

Question Items	Very much	Quite a lot	Not much	Not at all
16) Have you ever thought about the impact of this new portfolio assessment on teaching and your own learning?	8	15	6	4
17) Do you think your teacher has modified or adjusted teaching methods in your classroom?	7	14	7	5
18) Do you think you will modify or adjust your learning method after taking this portfolio assessment?	8	11	6	8
19) Generally, to what extent will you agree on the positive impact of portfolio on the classroom teaching and learning?	7	10	12	4

**Table 4.5**

From the table, we may find positive responses to those items regarding impact or washback of portfolio assessment mentioned in the Chapter 2. On question no. 16, the students have the intention of thinking about the impact of this new assessment practice. In other words, they intend to think about the benefits and costs of this assessment practice. One comment given by one participant (subject 8) should be enlightened here:

*'I definitely should think about that the impact of portfolio assessment. As the old essay-exam is boring and not so helpful for us students, I should*

*think about what kind of new factors this new practice can bring. I hope it can be beneficial for both my writing teacher and myself. The teacher herself can also improve their performance in portfolio, like improve the quality of feedback and revise our essays in more details and for many turns. In one word, I hope I can learn better from this.'*

From this comment, it seems that students would like to see the portfolio practice could bring in some new features, like improvement on teaching quality, learning behavior.

Question no. 17 and 18 addressed the impact issue in more detailed ways. Question 17 has displayed that students could notice the adjustment of teachers' teaching methods. Meanwhile, students' own learning behavior can be seen some modification from responses to question 18.

Question no. 19, the last question in this category, has presented more than half students think that there is a positive impact of portfolio assessment.

The sixth also the last category is composed of questions 20 and 21, which concerns the qualities of feedback received on students' writing products. See the following table 4.6 for results:

Question Items	Very much	Quite a lot	Not much	Not at all
20) Do you think your teacher has given sufficient feedback on your portfolio writing texts?	10	14	6	3
21) Do you think your fellow student has reviewed your written texts seriously and given useful feedback	6	11	10	6

**Table 4.6**

The responses here reflect different feeling about feedbacks received from teachers and fellow students. To be more specific, questions no. 20 has shown that students are satisfied with the feedback given by their teachers. In other words, they think the teachers have performed well and considered this assessment seriously.

However, for the question no. 21, although more students agree on that their fellow students have given good enough feedback, the disagreement is also apparent. This is interesting. Not so much students gave additional comments on this issue. One comment can be presented here for more understanding,

*'For this portfolio assessment, I do agree that the teacher has given very good feedback, which is helpful for my further correction and my improvement. However, I cannot say good to my fellow's comments. Maybe students used to giving very simple feedback. My fellow also used to say similar words with my teacher. But I did like this as well sometimes.'*(By Subject 4)

From this comment, we may see another important finding, that is, students may tend to give comments based on teacher's feedbacks. Back to my own experience, this is very common in China. Students may consider teachers' words as a kind of guide.

### **4.3 Analysis of the interviewing data**

Interviews have been conducted with 2 classroom teachers; both are from two classrooms involved in this study. The interview contains six questions with the interviewee (see appendix 2). The interviewing data have demonstrated that both teachers in this study also find this practice very new and they were not actually confident on this new practice at the very beginning because they felt worried that students may not feel interested on this. However, after one semester practice, they are happy to see that this practice goes well and students are well motivated.

The first interview question is to investigate the teachers' feelings of students' performance and improvement in the portfolio assessment. Both teachers have mentioned that they could find the students are improving themselves in this process, particularly in developing self-awareness of learning. Below is given by one teacher on this point:

*'Well, I can see the improvement in many drafts of one topic; the improvement of writing ability throughout the whole semester can also be*

*noticed. The students are not only correcting their mistakes based on my feedback and feedback from his colleague, but also developing a self-awareness of learning. They are more active in doing writing task. I can see they are interested in this new practice and then they would like to try their best to perform well.'*

The second question is on the teacher's feedback. Both teachers have reported their own guidelines for providing feedback. They have also mentioned that they should give more detailed feedback and the feedback should be more helpful. Below is from a teacher:

*'Not like giving a single score in the essay exam, I should provide different feedback at different stage. At the beginning, I would like to focus on the linguistics features; then for the second draft, I would like to focus on the structure and development of ideas.'*

The third and fourth question is concerned about teachers' feelings of peer's feedback and how students treat these peer's feedbacks. The teachers have also found, like the results from student questionnaire, at most time, peers' feedbacks are very general. Some are paraphrasing teachers' comments. Indeed, there may be case like teachers and fellow students have same or similar views. But the teachers are not satisfied on this part. They think they can do more on helping students improve the feedback they will provide for their fellow students. Regarding the student's attitude toward peer's feedback, both teachers have found most students have treated peers' feedbacks

seriously, and combine comments from both teachers and fellows for further revision. They think the students have achieved the goal of portfolio assessment in this point.

The fifth question is to investigate the changing of teachers' teaching behavior and methods. Both teachers agree that they have had to change their attitudes towards teaching. In addition, methodology should also be modified. Below is presented by one teacher:

*'Since we have used portfolio assessment in the classroom, actually we have to do more work and do more preparation than before. We have to get used to looking for more interesting writing tasks for students; providing more feedback; being more patient; learning more for both ourselves and students. Not like a single score for students beforehand, now students can read our comments and are eager to know why we say this. We did more work than before, but it is useful for all of us. At least we know how to make students feel happy when taking normally boring writing course and writing essays.'*

We can see that teachers have changed their teaching methods, which could verify the students' responses on this issue in student questionnaire. The teachers' modification is not in a single aspect, but multi-directional.

The last interview question is to find out teachers' overall feeling on this new practice and ideas about future development. From the interview, I can find

that both teachers are satisfied with this new portfolio writing assessment in that it provide great opportunity for both teachers and students even though there are space for further improvement in some aspects. They are confident about the further development of portfolio for future students. There are several aspects to be improved, which both teachers agree on. Those are improvement on quality of peer's feedback; including more group works during writing which could bring in more collaboration; involving students in the stage of selecting writing topics.

#### **4.4 Findings**

In the above sections, I have discussed the data collected around two research questions. All the questions deal with a central issue- using portfolio. The first question concerns students' perspectives on taking the portfolio. From the data, it could found out that most students have shown their preference to portfolio, compared to traditional timed essay exams. Such preference can be explained from that they many have been motivated through portfolio channels. Students have fully involved in the process of taking portfolio tasks, not only in providing feedback to their fellow students and doing more revisions and multi drafts; but also in achieving self-reflection.

On the first research question, it is clear to see that students like and are eager to participate in the portfolio assessment with his or her teacher and fellow, because they can reflect their own problems and drawbacks. They



have done this successfully. Although the feedbacks provided by students are sometimes not in good qualities, they would like to compare the feedbacks and think about themselves. This is a kind of progress and achievement. Data from questionnaire also demonstrated that portfolio assessment has introduced a positive impact on students' learning behavior and methods.

Nonetheless, it should also be acknowledged that there is not a great agreement on whether specific linguistic skills have been improved. This should be taken into consideration in further design and modification of portfolio.

Another research question is also related to the central issue, but it is to investigate teachers' perspectives. Teachers' comments during the interview have somehow further demonstrated the students' responses in the questionnaire, like self-reflection issue; feedback issue. In addition, teachers have also explained their own changes in writing instruction, which can demonstrate that the new portfolio assessment has affected the classroom instruction.

#### **4.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I have analyzed the data in details, including the questionnaire data and the qualitative data. The analysis of all the data helps to find many interesting points, and some of them have lead to the answers to the research

questions raised in the Chapter Three. In addition, the analysis and further discussion in some cases can demystify the uncertainty in the literature. However, the findings of this research are limited at certain aspects which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5 Conclusions and Implications

In the previous chapters, I have already addressed the relevant theoretical areas, previous research studies, rationales for this study, the research methods and techniques used in this research, and finally the analysis and discussion of the data. Back to literature addressed in the chapter 2, I have mentioned several features and purposes of portfolio assessment. Herman *et al* (1996) have addressed the portfolio will be effective; able to indicate individual progress; diagnostic; encouraging teacher efficacy; encouraging student efficacy. In this study, some aspects of those features have been demonstrated in different ways. It has been found out that students in this study are interested in taking portfolio; portfolio has helped them find their own drawbacks and improve their further learning.

At the same time, teachers can also achieve their professional development during the process of organizing the portfolio assessment, in varied aspects, like teaching methods, teaching behavior, and personal knowledge.

Nonetheless, as all the research and empirical studies may have drawbacks in different aspects, the research conducted here has some limitations as well. The first one is that lack of participants. As I have acknowledged in the previous chapters, the research is a small scale study; it cannot get big enough data from more participants. The sample can not be very representative. While for a more scientific research, the study of portfolio assessment should get attitudes from more students and teachers from more

classrooms and more campus. There are also some limitations in certain items of the questionnaire, like question no. 9 and 10 in the part 3 of questionnaire may be misleading for participants may not be sure about how to answer it, which make the results not satisfied. In addition, discussion of the portfolio assessment cannot rely on the attitudes of test takers and test users, which is only partial. For these reasons, some future research can be done in this area, which is summarized as follows:

- 1) More students take part in the questionnaire and selection of participants be more representative;
- 2) A more well design of the questions in the questionnaire to minimized the misleading;
- 3) Some students should be invited to take interviews after their finishing the questionnaire to get deeper ideas and clarify some uncertain parts in questionnaire
- 4) Involve more teachers in interview to get more clear understanding of teachers' perspective;
- 5) Some score data on students' performance in the portfolio and further statistical analysis can be done to make the study more reliable and scientific;
- 6) Some thorough discourse level analysis of students' texts at different stages can be useful to find out which aspects students have achieved most progress.
- 7) Additional discourse level analysis can be helpful to see the real situation of teachers' and students' feedback and to find out the focus and a clear picture of their feedback.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Student Questionnaire**

#### **I. Introduction to the research and Consent Form**

This research is going to investigate your perspectives on using the portfolio assessment. The research herein confirms that all the information collected from the survey will follow the ethical codes of ILTA (International Language Testing Association), and the BAAL's (British Association for Applied Linguistics) recommendations for students' projects, that is, all the collected information will only be used for this portfolio assessment study. In addition, what the subjects of this survey will say will be kept confidential and not be used for commercial purposes. The subjects of the survey have the right to withdraw information they have offered. Thanks a lot for your cooperation and your kind patience

Herein the researcher is going to get your consent of doing the survey. Are you going to finish the following survey?

**Yes**\_\_\_\_\_ **No**\_\_\_\_\_

#### **II. Survey on the background of yourself**

1. May I know your name please or your student ID number please?

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2. Your Gender Please.

Male\_\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_\_

3. Your Date of Birth (DD/MM/YYYY)

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you writing in English quite often outside the classroom of English related courses?

Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

### III. Survey on your perspectives on using portfolio writing assessment

Please tick your selection for each question. Thanks!

Question Items	Very much	Quite a lot	Not much	Not at all
1) Generally speaking, to what extent will you like the portfolio assessment, comparing with previous timed-essay exam?				
2) Do you think you have improved your writing ability through taking the portfolio assessment?				
3) Do you think you have performed well in the portfolio assessment?				
4) Do you think your potential audience of your writing texts (Your classroom teacher or your fellow students) will have impact on your portfolio performance?				
5) Do you think your cultural background and familiarity with writing tasks in the portfolio plays an important role in affecting your writing?				

6) Do you think you will like the new practice of portfolio assessment before taking it?				
7) Do you think you have been motivated through assessing fellow students' essays?				
8) Do you think you have been motivated through more feedback given by your teacher?				
9) Do you think your goals of improve specific language ability like grammar, vocabulary, etc, have been achieved?				
10) Do you think your linguistic knowledge have been fully presented in the process of participating in portfolio assessment?				
11) Do you think you have done self-reflection based on the varied feedback from both fellow students and teachers?				
12) Do you think your self-reflection has helped you find out problems in English writing and improved your writing performance?				
13) Do you think you have understood the feedbacks from teacher and fellow student when doing self-reflection?				
14) Do you try to find out the difference between feedbacks given by teachers and fellow students?				
15) Do you intend to find out new plans or alternatives when reviewing feedbacks?				

16) Have you ever thought about the impact of this new portfolio assessment on teaching and your own learning?				
17) Do you think your teacher has modified or adjusted teaching methods in your classroom?				
18) Do you think you will modify or adjust your learning method after taking this portfolio assessment?				
19) Generally, to what extent will you agree on the positive impact of portfolio on the classroom teaching and learning?				
20) Do you think your teacher has given sufficient feedback on your portfolio writing texts?				
21) Do you think your fellow student has reviewed your written texts seriously and given useful feedback				

**IV. Please provide any additional comment on using portfolio or suggestion for further development. You can also connect your comments to the questions you have finished in the part 3 of this questionnaire.**

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***Thanks a lot!***

## Appendix 2

### Guided Questions for Interview with Classroom Teachers

1. Could you please explain a little about your feeling about students' performance and improvement if available in the process of taking portfolio assessment?
2. Could you please say something about your feedback given to students' written texts for the portfolio?
3. Could you please say your feeling about review of students' peer feedback in the portfolio?
4. What's your feeling about students' attitude towards giving feedback for their fellow students and how they treat those feedbacks?
5. Do you think you have changed your teaching behavior or method somehow after using portfolio assessment in your classroom?
6. What is your overall feeling on this new portfolio assessment? Do you have any plan for further development or modification in the future?